

ru-ok? Briefing – February 2021

Newsflash (health warnings and other news):

- **Children of Alcoholics (CoA):** Becky shares her intimate and honest story of growing up with a Mum who drinks problematically. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-56001534>
- **Sexual Health tools:** BiSH is offering a Teach Yourself Sexual Health Guide, including resources for parents. <https://www.bishuk.com/parents/teach-yourself-sex-ed-gender-you-and-culture/?fbclid=IwAR3LdowV23xaejblMHvFChR7WK9Q6QDsunLxVDppsZoUr-YUJkAaduMysw>
- **Caffeine:** My battle to beat a 27yr Diet Coke addiction by Sirin Kale https://www.theguardian.com/food/2021/feb/02/the-real-thing-my-battle-to-beat-a-27-year-diet-coke-addiction?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other&fbclid=IwAR0SQRgTQJ1aM1OhgR2d7JFoo7chjKRJepVhxZ9D9hhfs1NzoSntNBcOZo
- **Alcohol:** Alcohol related deaths reach record high in England and Wales in pandemic. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/health-55900624?_twitter_impression=true&fbclid=IwAR1q9CTg2UPnmSlkvs0722NUvBxZZhBzEICXc6fHgj_h0yrK3qowscUNjN8

Current Trends:

Methoxetamine aka MXE and Mexxy: Mexxy seems to be being used by some young people, although we're unclear about its prevalence. This former legal high chemical is similar to ketamine, but less is known about it. Research so far suggests it is stronger and more harmful, with fewer of the desired effects. Mexxy comes in white powder form and could be being sold as ketamine. Ket users are being advised to test before use and proceed with caution. Mexxy and ketamine are Class B drugs so users risk arrest.

Children of Alcoholics (COA): It was COA Week 14-21/02 led by NACOA (National Association of Children of Alcoholics - <https://nacoa.org.uk/>). In Brighton we are fortunate to have Back On Track (<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/back-track-brighton-hove>). This service, led by Oasis Project and Brighton & Hove City Council, supports children of all ages affected by parental alcohol use and offers treatment to the parents. NACOA is also an excellent resource. Many young people have experienced or are experiencing this; by talking about it and sharing resources, we can let them know they are not alone.

LGBTQU+: February is also LGBTQ History month. The event originated with the abolition of Section 28 in 2003. This had prevented teachers from addressing LGBTQU+ issues in schools, leaving thousands of young people without support or recognition. Whilst we still have far to go, our society's made great progress in accepting and validating young people's sexual or gender identities. Life for teenagers identifying as LGBTQU+, even in Brighton, can be fearful, excluding and at times dangerous. Some may fear or face rejection from loved ones or encounter homophobia / transphobia. We know that some people seek a sense of belonging through using drugs (including alcohol) and others may use substances to ease their fears and anxieties. ru-ok? supports young people from all communities. Alongside support with their substance use, we explore identity, wellbeing and sexual health issues in a safe and confidential space. We link with Allsorts LGBTQU+ youth group for their expertise when needed, ensuring the young person receives appropriate support.

BHCC has made a series of videos for LGBTQ History Month. Watch them here: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/news/2021/celebrating-lgbtq-history-month-2021>

Children's Emergency Department and ru-ok? stats:

In January 2021, 9 patients aged 14 to 17 were reported to have attended A&E due to alcohol, cannabis, heroin, benzodiazepines, ketamine and unknown substances. Each was offered an appointment with ru-ok? for support and advice on how to stay safer in the future.

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Theme of the Month: Caffeine as a problem substance

Caffeine, for many, is the nectar of the gods that gets us up and functioning each day. It is in most teas, coffee, chocolate, energy drinks and some fizzy drinks. It is purported to have health and wellbeing benefits. So why bang on about it here? For some people, it can be a harmful dependence.

Case Study: Sam (not real name) smokes cannabis daily to help them sleep at night and feel calm in the day. Without it they feel overwhelmed and anxious. They also struggle to eat unless they have cannabis. On the surface, this looks like a cannabis issue, right? However, this young person also drank per day approx. 15x the recommended amount of caffeine for adolescents in a variety of drinks. They had not made the connection between the anxiety, sleeplessness and lack of appetite to the socially approved drinks. If the worker had not asked about caffeine intake, they would have been working on the wrong substance. Once the caffeine comes down, the cannabis will hopefully follow. Something that may have helped mask how much caffeine Sam was drinking, is the possibility that they have ADHD and caffeine affects those with ADHD differently.

So, how much caffeine is in drinks and how much is considered safe?

Drink per serving	Caffeine		Drink per serving	Caffeine
Filter coffee	140mg		Energy drink	80mg
Instant coffee	100mg		Espresso	45mg
Cup of tea	50mg		Green Tea	40mg
Can of cola	40mg			
Recommended daily maximum			Recommended daily maximum	
Adults	400mg		Teens 13 - 18	100mg

Using the OmniCalculator we built this table, showing how easy it is for teenagers to exceed a recommended maximum of 100mg. The guidance of safer caffeine use for children under 13 remains a little unclear. The European Food Safety Authority uses body weight as a measure rather than age, advising that safe doses are up to 3mg / kg body weight. This means that a safe level for a child weighing 30 kg would be 90mg caffeine.

In the article in our news section, Sirin Kale talks about her Diet Coke addiction; “Five cans on a good day, seven cans on a bad day. My boyfriend jokes about my morning routine: wake up, pad to the kitchen. The sound of a can cracking; a hiss. Glug glug glug. Yes, every morning.”

Harm reduction:

- **ASK.** Ask people about how much caffeine they drink and keep asking. With energy drinks and caffeinated soda pop being marketed to young people and used widely, it is a dependence that is easily overlooked, even for those taking it themselves.
- If someone wants to reduce, we recommend a scaled reduction rather than a sudden stop. Caffeine withdrawal can cause severe headaches and mood swings. A gradual change to decaffeinated drinks can help, as can switching to water.

We will support the city’s young people who want to reduce their caffeine if it has become problematic.

If you have any concerns about a young person’s drug or alcohol use, contact Brighton & Hove’s U18s substance use and sexual health service (ru-ok? inc DASH) which provides confidential support, advice and guidance to young people, their families, carers, friends and professionals, alongside treatment programmes for young people identifying problems arising from substance use and/or sexual health. A duty worker is available weekdays from 2 pm – 5 pm (4:30 on Fridays)

ru-ok? details: ru-ok? is on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook sharing useful information around drugs, alcohol and sexual health. Please follow us. Contact us at ru-ok? Tel: 01273 293966 or 07795 336436 or email Luci.Hammond@brighton-hove.gov.uk or RUOKDB@brighton-hove.gov.uk.

We would love your feedback!